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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [MO](#) [AG](#) [WI](#)
SUBJECT: VAN WALSUM'S READOUT OF SECOND ROUND OF WESTERN
SAHARA NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Amb. Jackie Sanders. E.O 12958. Reasons
1.4 (B&D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 13 meeting with Ambassador Sanders, UN/SYG Personal Envoy Peter Van Walsum said that the second round of Western Sahara negotiations had shown some engagement by the parties on peripheral substantive issues including natural resources and local administration, but that there had been no movement on the core final status issues. Van Walsum sought U.S. assistance prior to the next negotiation session scheduled for November to pressure the parties to abandon their rigid postures: for Morocco to limit CORCAS President Khalihenna Ould Errachid's provocative behavior and for the Polisario to be more open-minded about engaging on the Moroccan autonomy plan. End Summary.

Generally Positive Atmosphere, No Expectation of Progress

¶2. (SBU) Van Walsum gave a brief readout of the talks he had mediated between Morocco and the Polisario, held August 10-11 in Manhasset, NY. He noted that the atmosphere of the talks was generally positive for a second round and expressed some pleasure at the fact that the talks did not break down. At the same time, he said, it was clear that neither side was ready to move forward. He said he made an attempt to move from mere cordialities to a discussion of substantive issues by inviting two Secretariat officials to make presentations to the parties on issues that had "no direct bearing on sovereignty" but were important to the lives of the people on the ground: natural resources and local administration issues. Nicholas Hasum, from the Executive Office of the SYG, spoke on natural resources, and Leonardo Romeo, of the UN Capital Development Fund, spoke on local administration issues. While the Moroccan delegation initially objected to the presentations, it eventually engaged quite actively with UN officials and the Polisario on the subject matter.

¶3. (C) Van Walsum said he was less successful in attempting to convince Morocco to discuss confidence-building measures. Morocco objected in principle to the discussion of CBMs, arguing both that a framework for discussion of CBMs exists with UNHCR in Geneva, and that they did not want to take the time dedicated to talks with the Polisario to discuss "irrelevancies." They did not, however, rule out future discussion of CBMs, provided that they are tackled in an ad hoc context, and not under the auspices of UNSCR 1754. Van Walsum suspected that the Moroccan reluctance to broach this issue during the talks stemmed from their unwillingness to touch on issues of human rights violations in the Western Sahara. (Comment: Septel conversation with the Algerian delegation confirmed that a human rights-linked CBM was

indeed one of their aims. End comment.)

¶4. (C) Van Walsum reported that the presence of CORCAS President Khali'henna Ould Errachid continued to be an irritant to the Polisario. As in the first negotiations, Khali'henna lectured the Polisario delegation directly when given the floor rather than addressing his comments to Van Walsum per the agreed format for the meetings. Three members of the Polisario delegation, in turn, would leave the room whenever Khali'henna spoke, leaving one delegate so that the Polisario could not be accused of walking out on the talks. At meals, no Polisario official engaged in discussion with the CORCAS delegate. Overall, however, Van Walsum said that the Moroccans had been less provocative in the second round of talks than they had in the first.

Future Talks, Next Steps

¶5. (C) Van Walsum said that as in the second round, all future rounds would include an agenda item entitled "implementing resolution 1754," under which all controversial issues would be discussed. For such discussions, van Walsum said, the operative principle must be "nothing is decided until everything is decided" so as to enable the parties to negotiate freely. But getting the two sides to engage on substance was a challenge, and unless something changed within the calculations of the leadership of either Morocco or the Polisario between now and the next round, there could be no expected progress in that round.

¶6. (C) Van Walsum said that the U.S. could play a useful role by putting pressure on both sides to remove obstacles that hinder substantive discussions. For Morocco, van Walsum said, this meant reducing the role that the CORCAS representative plays in future negotiation sessions, though he admitted that such a role reduction may not be realistic considering Khali'henna's status as a royal appointee. For the Polisario, van Walsum said, this meant engaging constructively with the Moroccan plan by vigorously questioning and pressing Morocco for details on its considerable ambiguities in the course of future negotiations. Van Walsum acknowledged that in doing so, Polisario leadership would risk seeing their discussion publicized by the Moroccan Press Agency (MAP) as evidence that the Polisario accepted the Moroccan autonomy plan. As this round would happen on the eve of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic's (SADR) "National Congress" in December, such press would be politically disastrous for the Polisario leadership.

¶7. (C) Additionally, van Walsum suggested that the U.S. might find creative ways to minimize the influence that the press has on the negotiations, as the parties are currently reluctant to even discuss the proposals of the other side so as not to be portrayed as having conceded anything in their respective media and public opinions. He noted that because each side only publishes their successes in the national media, neither has prepared its political classes or public opinion for concessions or setbacks, and that this development portends negatively for the future.

¶8. (SBU) Van Walsum said that the parties have agreed to meet again during the second week of November somewhere in northeastern Switzerland at a location "as far away from UN people in Geneva as possible." He said the final communiqu  had said only that the negotiations would be "in Europe" because the Swiss government had not yet formally agreed to provide the facility; the communiqu  had left the date of the next round of talks vague in order to smooth ruffled Moroccan feathers over an earlier leak of the confidential arrangements for the next round to the Algerian press.

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